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APPLICATION FOR UNITED STATES LETTERS PATENT

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TITLE:

HAND-HELD TOOL CONTAINING A
REMOVABLY ATTACHABLE
OBJECT SENSOR

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HAND-HELD TOOL CONTAINING A REMOVABLY ATTACHABLE OBJECT SENSOR

5 [0001] This application is a continuation of U.S. Serial No. 09/993,177, which is a continuation-in-part of US 6,364,580, the entire contents of both are incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND

1. Field of the Invention

10 [0002] The present invention relates to hand-held electric or pneumatic tools having a sensor removably attachable to the tool.

2. Background Art

15 [0003] Hand-held tools powered by electricity (corded (AC) or battery pack (DC)) or compressed air, such as drills, reciprocating saws, screwdrivers, and nailers are extensively used by electricians, plumbers, carpenters and others. Common tasks for such devices generally include drilling holes, driving fasteners such as screws, and cutting various materials. Some of these tasks require the use of drill bits and tool bits which are typically stored separately from the hand-held drill.

20 [0004] Frequently, building tradesmen are confronted with the task of finding some suitable structure, such as a stud, hidden behind a visible wall surface to securely hold a nail or screw. Various stud sensors have been developed to locate studs using, for example, electromagnetic means to sense a nail located in the stud or by measuring changes in the density of the wall. These sensors can also be used to locate conduit, exhaust vents, rebar, plumbing and other hidden material a tradesman may wish to avoid drilling or cutting into. More importantly, building tradesman have to drill holes or cut materials in the vicinity of "live" electrical lines. Various sensors have been developed to locate electrical wires, especially "live" wires. Further, other types of sensors have been developed to help tradesmen locate and distinguish different materials hidden behind walls. Collectively, these sensors are defined as object sensors.

30 [0005] While highly effective, one problem with such object sensors is that they are a separate piece of equipment that the tradesman may lose or merely not carry on him when he needs it. Prior art solutions have been to provide the workers with

pouches and the like which can be worn about the workman's waist. While these pouches eliminate the need for the operator to leave the workplace to get the object sensor, the workman must remember to first place the object sensor in the pocket and then search the myriad of pockets to find the object sensor. Thus, a significant savings of time may not be realized.

[0006] Therefore, there exists a need for a device that combines a hand-held power (AC and/or DC) or pneumatic tool with a removably attachable object sensor.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0007] Accordingly, an object of the present invention is to provide a handheld power (AC and/or DC) or pneumatic tool having a removably attachable portion comprising an sensor.

[0008] In accordance with this and other objects, the present invention provides a hand-held power tool having a housing. The housing includes a drive mechanism connected to a rotary output shaft which is aligned along a tool axis. Further, a handle portion is aligned along a handle axis. The handle portion has a power activator switch thereon for activating the drive mechanism. A removably attachable portion comprising an object sensor is removably attached to the housing. The tool may be powered by electricity (AC and/or DC power) or compressed air.

[0009] In another embodiment, a hand-held drill comprises a battery pack.

[0010] A removably attachable portion containing the object sensor is removably attached to the battery pack.

[0011] The removably attachable portion may further comprise a level.

[0012] In another embodiment, the hand-held tool is a reciprocating saw having a drive mechanism and a housing. A removably attachable portion comprising an object sensor is removably attached to the housing. The reciprocating saw may be powered by electricity (AC or DC) or compressed air.

[0013] The above object and other objects, features, and advantages of the present invention are readily apparent from the following detailed description of the best mode for carrying out the invention when taken in connection with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0014] FIGURE 1 is a perspective view of a hand-held power tool having a removably attachable portion comprising an object sensor, in accordance with the present invention.

5 [0015] FIGURE 2 is a cross-sectional of a hand-held power tool having a removably attachable portion having an object sensor therein, in accordance with the present invention;

[0016] FIGURE 3 is a perspective view of a hand-held power tool having a removably attachable portion having an object sensor and a level, in accordance with
10 the present invention;

[0017] FIGURE 4 is a perspective view of the power source end of a handheld power tool having a removably attachable portion having an object sensor and level, accordance with the present invention;

[0018] FIGURE 5 is a perspective view of the power source end of a handheld
15 power tool having a removably attachable portion having an object sensor and a level, in accordance with the present invention.

[0019] FIGURE 6 is a perspective view of the removably attachable portion having a level on a piece of wood in accordance with the present invention;

[0020] FIGURE 7 is a top of the removably attachable portion having an
20 object sensor in accordance with the present invention;

[0021] FIGURE 8 is a perspective view of a hand-held power tool having a bull's eye level; and

[0022] FIGURE 9 is a perspective view of a reciprocating saw powered by compressed air having a removably attachable portion comprising an object sensor
25 accordance with the present invention.

BEST MODE FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

[0023] Referring now to Figure 1, an electric hand-held power drill 10 is shown. Power drill 10 has a housing 12 which accommodates a drive mechanism and motor 14 for driving a rotary output shaft 16. The drive mechanism, motor, and rotary
30 output shaft are aligned along a tool axis 18. Housing 12 further includes a handle

portion 20 for gripping the power tool 10, and directing a tool end 21 toward a workpiece. Handle portion 20 is aligned along a handle axis 22.

[0024] In operation, a tool such as a tool bit, drill bit, or similar device is coupled to the rotary output shaft 16 for working on a workpiece. The tool is removably coupled to rotary output shaft 16 using a chuck 29, as conventionally known. Chuck 29 may be keyless or require a key (not shown) to open and close the chuck. Common tasks performed by the tool and hand-held power drill combination include, for example, drilling holes and driving fasteners on and into the workpiece.

[0025] A power activation switch 24 is disposed on the handle for activating the drive mechanism and motor 14 to rotate the rotary output shaft. Preferably, a battery 26 is connected to the handle portion 20 at the power supply end 28 and provides electrical DC power to activate the drive mechanism and motor 14 for rotating the rotary output shaft 16. However, the present invention may be incorporated into corded power drills (not shown) supplying AC power as well. The term electric as used in this application means electric power by means of AC or DC power. Additionally, the present invention may be incorporated into compressed air-powered tools as well (as shown in Figure 9). The drive mechanism 14 and power activation switch 24 for a compressed air-powered tool will be of a type known by those skilled in the art.

[0026] In accordance with the preferred embodiment of the present invention, removably attachable portion 30 is illustrated showing it attached to drill 10 in both a perspective and cross-sectional view in Figures 1 and 2, respectively. The removably attachable portion 30 is slid onto housing 12 from the rear. Housing 12 may contain outwardly projecting flanges 72 which create grooves 76. Removably attachable portion 30 has inwardly projecting flanges 34 creating grooves 36. When the removably attached portion 30 is slid onto housing 12, the flanges 34 and 72 cooperate with grooves 36 and 76 to fix the removably attachable portion onto housing 12 as shown in Figure 2. A detailed description of removably attachable portion 30 will be provided hereinafter.

[0027] Alternatively, as shown in Figure 3, the removably attachable portion 30 can be attached to the drill 10 using a pair of protrusions 54 and 56 extending upwards from housing 12. A pair of recesses 58 and 59 formed in the bottom of

removably attachable portion 30 are sized to receive protrusions 54 and 56 and removably attach the removably attachable portion 30 to the housing 12. Conversely, the removable attachable portion 30 may comprise protrusions and the housing 12 may contain recesses to receive the protrusions. Other attachment schemes, known to
5 individuals of ordinary skill in the art, which allow removably attachable portion 30 to be removably attached to housing 12 may also be used.

[0028] In an alternative embodiment illustrated in Figures 4 and 5, the removably attachable portion 30 is disposed at the power supply end 28 of the handle portion 20. Power supply end 28 has a pair of slots 44 configured to removably affix
10 removably attachable portion 30 to housing 12. Removably attachable portion 30 has an underside 45 formed to fit slots 44 for removable attachment thereto.

[0029] As best shown in Figures 2 and 5, removably attachable portion 30 includes an object sensor 60 for detecting studs hidden underneath drywall, electrical lines, conduit, pipe, various metals, rebar, and other hidden materials. The object
15 sensor 60 is of a type commonly available. The object sensor 60 may include a visible light 62 which illuminates when the object sensor is placed over a stud as shown in Figure 7. Further, the object sensor may comprise a speaker 64 which makes an audible sound when, for example, a stud or "live" wire is detected. Other features, such as meters, may also be included depending on the features of the object sensors.

20 Additionally, removably attachable portion 30 may be configured with a level 52.

[0030] Removably attachable portion 30 also may be provided with a recess 38 for receiving tool bit 40 where the bit is captured in recess 38 by a detent formed by two opposing spring protrusions 42. Preferably, an identical recess 38 is disposed on the opposite side of removably attachable portion 30 having a detent formed by spring
25 protrusions 42 for holding another tool bit 40 securely in place.

[0031] In operation, the drill 10 of the present invention is used as a normal drill. When the tradesman must check the orientation of a surface, he can detach the removably attachable portion 30 from the drill and place it on a surface 70 as shown in Figure 6. To locate a stud or other hidden materials, the removably attachable portion
30 30 is detached from drill 10 and moved along a surface 80 until stud 75 is located as shown in Figure 7.

[0032] Additionally, as shown in Figure 8, a bull's eye bubble level 78 is disposed at the rear end of housing 12 in a plane essentially perpendicular to tool axis 18 to indicate when the tool axis is vertical.

5 **[0033]** The present invention may also be incorporated onto other hand-held power tools such as a reciprocating saw (as shown in Figure 9), a nailer, a power screwdriver, a circular saw, or a jigsaw. The tools may be powered by electric power (corded (AC) or battery operated (DC)), compressed air, or other means.

10 **[0034]** Referring now to Figure 9, reciprocating saw 100 has a housing 112, and a drive mechanism 114. In this example, the drive mechanism is powered by compressed air through nipple 150 in a manner known by those skilled in the art. The removably attachable portion 130 comprises an object sensor 160 and is removably attachable to housing 112 in any manner as described above. The object sensor 160 may further comprise a light 162 and speaker 164 to alert the tradesman of the presence of a stud, electrical line, or other hidden materials.

15 **[0035]** Thus, the present invention has many advantages and benefits over the prior art. For example, the present invention provides a means for making a sensor and level readily available to a tradesman.

20 **[0036]** Alternatively, the object sensor can be designed to attach to the electric power cord and/or the compressed air hose. The object sensor may comprise a trough on any of its surfaces sized to receive the electric power cord and/or compressed air hose. The trough may be sized slightly smaller than the cord and/or hose for secure attachment. Tangs may project from the surface having the trough to partially cover the trough to further secure the cord and/or hose. When the tradesman desires to use the object sensor, he can either use the sensor attached to the cord and/or hose or simply
25 remove the object sensor from the cord and/or cable by gently pulling on the object sensor until it is released. When finished, the tradesman can reattach the object sensor to the cord and/or hose by pressing the cord and/or hose into the trough.

30 **[0037]** The object sensor may also be attached to the cord and/or hose using a C-shaped clamp that is attached to the housing. The C-shaped clamp may be manufactured out of a resilient plastic or metal such that it flexes to fit over the cord and/or hose and then snaps back securely around the cord and/or hose. The other end

of the clamp may be directly attached to the object sensor or connected to the object sensor using a chain or similar device. Similarly, the tradesman may use the object sensor while it is attached to the cord and/or hose or he may remove the object sensor with a gentle pull for use and reattach it to the cord and/or hose when finished using it.

5 **[0038]** One skilled in the art by devise alternate methods of attaching the object sensor to the cord and/or hose.

[0039] While embodiments of the invention have been illustrated and described, it is not intended that these embodiments illustrate and describe all possible forms of the invention. Rather, the words used in the specification are words of
10 description rather than limitation, and it is understood that various changes may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention.